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CHAPTER 3

THE CITY OF GREAT PRINCIPLES

The name Ta Li, meaning "Great Principles", was given to the city by its founder King Pi-Lo-Ko of Nan Chao in 746 A.D. It was not the first city to be built on the plain, for it was preceded by T'ai Ho Ch'êng, also a capital of Nan Chao, which stood on the site now occupied by T'ai Ho T'sun, a village some five miles south of Ta Li, half way to Hsia Kuan. Earlier than this a fortified site upon the mountain slope above Ta Li shows traces of occupation which may date from neolithic times. Ta Li as it now stands is a walled city rectangular in shape, about one mile long by half a mile in width. At some past date it was enlarged by extending the west and east walls by a third again, and building a new south wall. The old south wall was demolished, but the old south gate, known to day as the Wu Hua Lou, the Tower of Five Glories, was left intact and used as a bell tower. Although the area thus enclosed by walls is large, very little of it is now occupied with buildings. The long main street connecting the north and south gates, and the less busy east and west gate streets, are flanked by quiet residential lanes, which, long before the walls are reached, tail off into market gardens and fields. Almost every house has its ample garden, and wide areas of vacant land are used as parade grounds and fair grounds for the fortnightly market.

It is certain that the city was formerly more inhabited than at present, for within the past century it has sustained two disasters of the first magnitude. In 1874 on the suppression of the Moslem rebellion the citizens of that religion, some ten thousand in number, were put to the sword, and thus probably half, or at least a third, of the inhabitants of Ta Li

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669 perished. The extensive ruins of their houses now covered
731 with cactus and wild shrubs, still encumber large parts of the walled enclosure. These older ruins are for the most part in the south east part of the city, those due to the great earthquake of 1925 are found in all parts. This second disaster caused great destruction and a heavy loss of life. The main street was burnt out, and thus the merchant community suffered a total loss of their goods, which were not of course covered by any form of insurance. The loss of life was not so heavy as in the country, where along the lake shore hundreds died in the sudden collapse of their homes. Most of the dwellings in the city were however, either ruined, or so badly damaged as to be uninhabitable. More solidly built, or as the faithful believe, protected by the gods, the great pagodas outside the city and the main temples inside the walls, withstood the shock, as did three out of the four Gate Towers.

As there is no form of insurance operating in Yunnan these heavy losses fell wholly upon the householders themselves. For years the city lay almost in ruins. Slowly, as wealth accumulated, men began to rebuild, first their shops, then the homes of the richer classes, and still to-day the work of reconstruction goes on. During the years 1937 and 1938
341 more than thirty ruinous houses were rebuilt. Fortunately Ta Li was then still far from the centres of progress and innovation, so the old style of architecture was employed in rebuilding the city, unchanged by the rather unhappy influence of European ideas found in too many of the new buildings in the greater cities of China. Ta Li to-day, no longer a city of ruins, is one of the most attractive examples of a small Chinese city built entirely in Chinese style. The end and back walls of the better class houses are made of the local granite building stone, the front, where the windows and doors are placed, of wood, and the roofs are tiled. The three solid walls are plastered and whitewashed on the out-